
MEDIA RELEASE

WOOLSEY FIRE UNIFIED COMMANDERS



Public Safety and Repopulation Efforts for the Woolsey Fire Areas

The western edge of Los Angeles County has realized a crippling disaster with the damages caused by the Woolsey Fire. In less than a week, over 98,000 acres have been destroyed and firefighting efforts are still underway. Lives were lost, homes and property were left charred and uninhabitable, and memorabilia is gone that cannot be replaced. Although many cities and unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County sustained great loss, portions of Malibu, and other nearby areas, must be completely rebuilt.

Even as many residents return to their properties, others with homes in nearby areas may be asking why they are not being allowed back in. With power and telephone poles burned, gas lines compromised and roadways destroyed, multiple agencies must work together to inspect the impacted areas and determine overall safety. Representatives from many County of Los Angeles entities, including the sheriff's and fire departments, public works, public health, social services, animal control, and the Office of Emergency Management are meeting every few hours to reassess progress in areas being considered for repopulation. These representatives are joined by officials from utility companies, cities, the California Highway Patrol, CAL FIRE, local, state and federal agencies, and contract officials in making decisions about opening as many areas as possible following this devastating event. They determine the overall safety and functionality of our infrastructure. Thankfully, support organizations provide shelter and other essentials to those in need during this process. **The goal of all involved is to re-open the closed areas as quickly as possible while ensuring public safety!**

Displaced residents have a large base of support and assistance available to them, as the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services and the Department of Animal Care and Control, amongst others, have an established relationship with the American Red Cross. They work together in the event of a disaster, such as this one. Together, they coordinate with organizations and local resources to provide services, food and shelter for residents, domestic pets and other displaced wildlife. For the Woolsey Fire, three evacuation centers for residents are still open at Palisades High School, Taft High School and Pierce College, with a capacity to house a total of 1,175 people. Currently, 1,106 beds are available with staff ready to serve those in need.

The County of Los Angeles has many branches working together to make our communities safe and restore basic services, but it unfortunately takes time. There are many considerations before allowing an area to be repopulated. A methodical, multi-pronged process of inspection and evaluation must be conducted to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all our residents. Conditions of roads; open land for trees on the brink of falling, rock slide hazards; unsafe standing, damaged or destroyed structures; hazardous materials and the overall condition of the basic functional infrastructure and utility services are just some of the many considerations. Businesses must be able to provide basic services before they can reopen. We understand how being held back from returning home can be frustrating to displaced residents who are anxious to see the state of their houses and property.

Before an area is reopened, public works, or Caltrans for state highways, must inspect all roadways for burned and missing guardrails, signage, traffic signals, compromised pavement or other safety fixtures. The roads themselves have debris, rocks and other obstructions that must be cleared for safe passage. Because of how the fire effects the landscape, expect material and rocks to fall onto roadways in the coming days and weeks. Many streets may have downed power lines. Roads cannot be reopened until they are safe for the public to travel.

Water service providers must first make sure that electric utilities are able to provide consistent power to supply pumps. Water lines can then be re-pressurized. Water suppliers must make sure water meets health and safety standards, and address any leaks in the system before an area can be repopulated. Water is being turned off at the meter to properties severely damaged or destroyed to curtail water waste, flooding or mudslides.

Once an area is deemed safe to enter, natural gas technicians survey each area to assess which properties are habitable. Service and cap lines to destroyed properties are abandoned so service may be restored to habitable homes. Once residents return, they are not to attempt to turn on gas service to their homes. An adult resident must accompany a credentialed natural gas service provider representative to inspect their properties before gas service is restored to individual properties.

We strongly encourage victims of the Woolsey Fire who are displaced and in need of temporary housing to use the resources at the evacuation centers. Coordinated efforts better suit the needs of our residents and are readily distributed in a safe and organized manner.

Team members from the United States Department of Homeland Security Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Disaster Survivor Assistance (DSA) were deployed to key locations, including evacuation centers, to direct impacted residents to sources of assistance and help them register with FEMA for disaster aid. You may also register with FEMA online at www.DisasterAssistance.gov or by calling 800-621-3362 or 800-

462-7585 for TTY. The toll-free telephone numbers are open seven days a week, from 4:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. Pacific Standard Time.

Disaster assistance can include FEMA grants for temporary housing, home repair and replacement, as well as low-interest disaster loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration. These loans are available to businesses, private nonprofit organizations, homeowners, and renters to cover losses not fully compensated by insurance or other recovery options.

For updated information on evacuation centers and animal shelters, visit:
lacounty.gov/woolseyfire/

If you wish to contribute to relief efforts, please contact:

- American Red Cross: redcross.org
- United Way: unitedway.org
- Los Angeles Fire Department Foundation:
<https://twitter.com/LAFDFoundation>
- Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care and Control:
www.lacountyanimals.org

If you are looking for a loved one, register with a cross-reference registration system with the American Red Cross here:

<https://safeandwell.communityos.org/cms/index.php>

We are grateful to our residents and local businesses who continue to be patient and understanding as we work together to restore our communities.

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